CBS MEMORANDUM

FROM: Irv Drasnin
TO: PERRY WOLFF
DATE: June 12, 1974

Some random thoughts and background on Robert Penn Warren that might bear on his suitability for a one-hour conversation with Eric Sevareid.

1. Eric Bentley has written of Warren:

> "There is Warren the critic, the cosmopolitan, the scholar, the philsopher; and there is Warren the raconteur, the Kentuckyan, the humorist, the ballad maker...a deeply American writer."

Bentley sees Warren as a man "loyal to the concrete and the human, standing apart from movements and doctrinal conformities."

2. Warren, since publishing his first poem 52 years ago, has been poet, novelist, essayist, critic, historian, editor, teacher and, in his own way, reporter-sociologist.

3. He is the only writer ever to win the Pulitzer Prize for both fiction, "All the King's Men," and poetry, "Promises, Promises." ("All the King's Men" also won the academy award as best picture of 1949. It has been widely translated abroad, including the Soviet Union and Bulgaria. The Russians have also made a movie version of it.) His list of other literary awards runs about two inches in small type.

4. He is of the South and that considerable literary tradition, but he is not merely a Southerner...either in mentality or in experience. One of his forebears, John Penn, signed the Declaration of Independence. Warren was a Rhodes Scholar; was one of the founders and co-editors of "The Fugitive" (at Vanderbilt, 1920's) and was founder and editor of "The Southern Review," one of, if not the, most influential literary publications of the 1930's.

5. He is not "other-worldly." He has been a teacher for forty years: in the South (Louisiana State University), the North (University of Minnesota), and the East (Yale). He will be teaching next fall in New York City, at Hunter. He is still writing.

In the 1950's and 1960's he wrote two books on the racial issue and

the black revolution. The second, "Who Speaks for the Negro," is a series of interviews with commentary and analysis of black leadership, from Malcolm X to Martin Luther King.

His most recent writing has concentrated on observations and interpretations of American life, contemporary and historical. He has often addressed himself to those catch-words used to analyze and examine contemporary American life: "alienation," "identity-crisis," "quality of life," etc. At the same time, he is a remarkable student of history and literature (a statement easily supported by a great quantity of material we have at hand).

He is intimately acquainted, through his teaching, with three generations of American youth in different parts of the country.

6. The major themes of his work are universal and of considerably more than passing interest. Many of them bear directly on our national life today. In "All the King's Men," for example, what Warren is writing about includes:

(1) politics and power, and the corruption of power;
(2) idealism and morality;
(3) the search for personal identity;
(4) the destruction of (political) opposition;
(5) the manipulation and control of the press;
(6) cover-up;
(7) impeachment;
(8) assassination;
(9) means and ends;
(10) the nature and meaning of democracy.

7. He and his wife (also a writer) live and work in a converted barn near Fairfield, Connecticut. He is currently finishing a new book of poetry and a book version of his recent Jefferson Lectures. He is 70 years old.

8. He has been called the most distinguished man of American letters still living and working. He seems uniquely qualified, on many counts, for the kind of broadcast we're talking about. And, I think, he's different as well.